Book Reviews

Review Article


When the Ottoman Sultan Salīm I (918–926/1512–1520) conquered Jerusalem in 922/1516, Islam’s third holiest city became part of a world empire that straddled parts of Asia, Africa and Europe.¹ Jerusalem in the early Ottoman period was an undisputed small “Arab” city of around 4000 inhabitants. It was not a centre of any political import;² as such, it was not the fulcrum of political activity as it is currently or as it was during the Crusades or during the reign of the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705). Jerusalem was also geographically removed from the main routes for trade and pilgrimage. The city was considered holy by nature of its association with the Prophet and his nocturnal journey (mi’rāj). Yet, Jerusalem was not an essential part of the pilgrimage to Makkah and Madīnah; its religious importance remains individual and not prescribed. For whereas pilgrimage to Makkah is a pillar of the Muslim faith that every Muslim attempts to fulfil at least once in their lifetime, the visit to Jerusalem (ziyārah) remained a personal choice and mostly the practice of ṣūfis and ascetics. The centre of this vast Ottoman Empire was Istanbul, where the political identity and visual image of the Ottomans were crystallised during the sixteenth century. The foundations

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¹ A world empire can be defined as an overarching political super-structure that encompasses smaller economic units that are largely self-contained, and each consisting of a metropolitan centre and its hinterland. For a discussion of the Ottoman Empire as a world empire and its later integration into a world economic system see, H. Islamoglu and C. Keydar, “Agenda for Ottoman History” in Huri Islamoglu-Inan, ed., The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Re’sat Kasaba, The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: the Nineteenth Century (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); and E. Wallerstein, “The Ottoman Empire and the Capitalist World-Economy: Some Questions for Research” in Review, II: 3, 389–98.

² Jerusalem became an administrative/ political centre (mutaṣarrifiyyah) only in 1873.
The conquest of Syria, Egypt, Hijaz, Iraq and the Yemen during the sixteenth century increased Ottoman commercial superiority. By the middle of the century, the Ottomans had full control over the traditional international trade routes by virtue of holding the areas surrounding the Red Sea to the south and the Aleppo-Mosul corridor to the north-east. This new geopolitical reality meant that the Ottomans were now in control of the main trade routes of the Old World: the sea routes through the East Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; and the traditional caravan route connecting Anatolia to Syria, and through the Euphrates to Iraq, Iran and India.

It is within the parameters of trade, pilgrimage, and hegemony that sixteenth-century Jerusalem should be studied. It is essentially different than a study of any political or commercial centre such as Istanbul, Cairo or Damascus, but it is also different from the study of architectural and urban development in Makkah or Madinah. The questions, assumptions, and expectations raised by the study of sixteenth-century Jerusalem should reflect a
wider understanding of its Ottoman context on the one hand, and Jerusalem’s significance and location, more generally, on the other. *Ottoman Jerusalem: The Living City, 1517–1917* is a welcome and most timely contribution to the study of the last 400 years of Jerusalem’s history and urban culture. The book is a two-volume, massive production (1168 pages) with articles by thirty-three specialists in the fields of art, architecture, urbanism, as well as social, political, economic and intellectual history. The first volume is a compendium of articles that may be grouped under four general topics: political and economic history; intellectual and family history; the art and architecture of Ottoman Jerusalem; and the architecture of the Dome of the Rock. Within each group at least one article deals with the whole duration of the Ottoman rule in Jerusalem. Most articles, however, concentrate on the initial boom in Jerusalem that started under Sulṭān Sulaymān around the middle of the sixteenth century.

The second volume of the book is an architectural survey of the public monuments built under Ottoman patronage. The survey is based on the doctoral research of Dr Yusuf Natsheh, Director of the Department of Islamic Archaeology at the administration of Awqāf and Islamic affairs in Jerusalem. Natsheh’s contribution to “Ottoman Jerusalem” comprises a substantial analytical article in the first volume (Ch. 36) in addition to the architectural survey in the second volume. His intimate knowledge of the city throughout years of work with the Administration of Awqāf as well as his diligent and impeccable use of the Islamic court records produced nuanced layers of knowledge of the city, its architecture and its history. The buildings included in his survey are presented not only as stone and mortar, but as a social history of the city, its patrons and its monuments. Natsheh also uncovered the dates of various buildings whose patronage and date of construction were previously unknown. Another major contribution by Natsheh is the survey of the architects/builders working in Jerusalem. Architects, such as members of the Nammar family (some of whom are still well known architects in Jerusalem and Amman), were responsible for construction and maintenance of buildings. They also took responsibility for the management of building trades and aspects of city administration (see also Atallah, Ch. 12).

*Ottoman Jerusalem* was published on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (currently part of the Council for British Research in the Levant) in co-operation with the Administration of Awqāf and Islamic Affairs in Jerusalem. Similar to other excellent books published on the arts and cultures of Muslim societies, *Ottoman Jerusalem* was published by Altajir World of Islam Trust, and with the personal support of His Excellency Mohamed Mahdi Altajir. The book was perceived as a sister volume for the...
World of Islam Festival Trust’s earlier publication *Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Survey* (London: 1987). The two books are complementary in their approach, consistency and excellent presentation. Jointly, they represent the best source on the architecture of Jerusalem from the thirteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century.  

Notwithstanding the similarities, however, there is a major difference between the two books. Michael Burgoyne’s *Mamluk Jerusalem* was mainly an architectural study concerned with issues of architectural style and patronage during the Mamluk period (658–922/1260–1516). D. S. Richards’ excellent historical research added flesh to the buildings and made the book more relevant for wider historical research on the Mamluks and their systems of patronage. *Ottoman Jerusalem*, on the other hand, is much wider in scope and focus. The architectural survey carried out by Yusuf Natsheh remains the linchpin for the whole study, and follows the methods and approaches set by Burgoyne’s seminal publication. Combining his knowledge of the buildings with his research in the Islamic court records of Jerusalem, Natsheh provides a continuous narrative of the life cycle of buildings under survey. Through his work, we learn when a building was erected, who was responsible for its construction and maintenance, where building materials came from, how a building was used in terms of revenue and expenditure, and the changes in a building’s use and maintenance for the duration of the period under study. In addition, the book benefits tremendously from the nature of available resources and the number and diverse backgrounds of the specialists contributing to the study. Indeed, the book breaks new boundaries in addressing the architecture of the city within the wider context of social and intellectual life in Jerusalem.

*Ottoman Jerusalem* and its place in academic debate, Research and publications on Jerusalem present different perspectives. Jerusalem is revered as the embodiment of political and cultural Palestinian identity. As such, the city and its symbolic value are immortalised in songs, poetry, fiction, media and political manifestos. Jerusalem is also revered for its religious importance. Muslims, Christians and Jews have forwarded competing claims about the city and its link to each of the Abrahamic faiths. Such claims are documented in well-established traditions of publications. Examples include literature about the merits of Jerusalem (*adab al-fadā’il*), numerous pilgrimage accounts that put one faith’s claim against another (such as the texts translated and edited by the Palestine Pilgrim’s Text Society), and the ongoing research and publications in the field of Biblical archaeology. The exploration of the “Holy

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4 The same publishers are currently considering a third publication covering various aspects of Ayyubid Jerusalem.
Land” and the twin developments of photography and mass tourism during the nineteenth century generated a new perception of Jerusalem, and more generally of Palestine. As part of a colonial/Zionist discourse, the “forsaken land” became a prime target for the civilising missions of the Western world and ultimately led to the Balfour Declaration and its aftermath. Parallel to this literature, there is a tradition of Western-style academic studies of Jerusalem and its history.

Over the last two decades, a variety of political, economic, and, more recently, social studies have been published on Ottoman Palestine, both in Arabic and various Western languages. Studies on Ottoman Jerusalem, like those of Ottoman Palestine, are mainly a product of the exploration and interpretation of the Ottoman archives and the Islamic Court Records (sijills) that has started since the 1970s. Records from the sijills and private family papers kept in the personal possession of Jerusalem’s traditional families brought the city and its history into life (‘Asali, ‘Alami, ‘Arif and their various previous publications). Khadr Salameh’s analysis of some aspects of the Islamic Court Records of Jerusalem (Ch. 10) gives an indication of the various possibilities for investigation and interpretation. It is important to note, however, that there is more than one microfilm copy of the Jerusalem records. The University of Jordan, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the University of Haifa have copies that are available for researchers. All the collections were widely used by researchers who collectively produced an impressive record of everyday life in Jerusalem throughout the Ottoman period.

The excellent research in Hillenbrand and Auld’s Ottoman Jerusalem complements and contributes to the last thirty years of publications both in the field of Ottoman studies and architectural studies. The book has a similar approach and methodology to other Ottoman urban studies such as those of Aleppo or Nablus. The book also transcends the study of Jerusalem’s

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6 In 1991, Dr Muhammad Adnan Bakhit published a full index of the collection of the records of Jerusalem for the period 1529 to 1984 (Amman: 1991). He also published an index of the microfilm copies of Islamic Court records kept in the department of Documents and Manuscripts at the University of Jordan. The collection includes records from all over Palestine, Jordan in addition to Damascus and Aleppo (Amman: 1984).

7 The second volume of the book includes an excellent and up-to-date bibliography of publications on Jerusalem.
architecture and urban fabric. It proposes an overall assessment of the city’s workings and machinations. Overall, the book’s concerns are well balanced. It deals with architectural style and aesthetics on the one hand, and issues of social and intellectual context of the buildings and their patronage on the other. Thus, the academic importance of *Ottoman Jerusalem* goes well beyond the use of *waqf* documents and Islamic Court Records. In terms of architectural studies, *Ottoman Jerusalem* is also significantly important. In addition to documenting more than fifty buildings that are published for the first time, Natsheh’s survey (vol. 2) presents a wealth of historical material pertaining to those buildings including inscriptions and endowment deeds. Other articles in the first volume address certain buildings (Hawari, Ch. 32; Myers, Ch. 34; and 35) or certain architectural features (Burgoyne, Ch. 31; Auld, Ch. 24; and Sharif, Ch. 30). The book also has three articles dealing with general characteristics of Ottoman architecture (Hillenbrand, introduction; Myers, Ch. 23; Natsheh, Ch. 36). Even though the articles overlap in topic and general approach, each of the three authors presents a personal view of Ottoman architecture in Jerusalem. This may be regarded as a shortcoming or a blessing; readers are well advised to read the three articles and form their own opinion. A more straightforward shortcoming is that the book fails to present an assessment of the architectural style in Ottoman Jerusalem in comparison with other Ottoman centres. In that sense, Hillenbrand’s introductory article touches upon the comparisons between Jerusalem and Damascus or Cairo, for example, yet he does not address the issue of the influence of specifically Ottoman architectural features on the local building style in Jerusalem.8

**Ottoman Jerusalem: A Question of Perspective**

As mentioned above, the book’s strength lies in combining the architectural study with the study of social, economic and intellectual aspects of Jerusalem. However, this is not without its problems. Specifically, the articles it contains overlap in some cases and at times seem unrelated. Undoubtedly the book embarks on a monumental task. This task is both facilitated and necessitated by development of the academic debate in Ottoman studies and the wealth of archival and literary material from the period. Yet, it requires an understanding of the sources and architecture, and also assumes familiarity with the unfolding of Ottoman history as well as the history of Jerusalem over

a period of 400 years. The task is further complicated by the overlapping variables of the world-wide economic and political history which had impact on the Ottomans and the residents of Jerusalem alike. In this case one wonders if the architectural material really benefited from a combined publication; would it have made any difference if this material had been published as an altogether separate book? That is, does the inclusion of articles addressing the various social and political histories in *Ottoman Jerusalem* obfuscate rather than elucidate our perspective?

This brings me to the issue of the book’s time frame (1517–1917). Abdul-Karim Rafeq’s contribution to the book provides a general outline for the political history of Ottoman Jerusalem. His article (Rafeq, Ch. 1) follows the common wisdom in Ottoman studies that divides Ottoman rule in the region into two distinct periods: 1516–1831, and 1831–1917. The first period was the period of conquest and the establishment of administrative and legislative framework for the region. Although by no means homogenous, the administrative framework within which Jerusalem operated remained almost consistent. Major changes took place only after the Egyptian occupation of Syria and Palestine (1831–1840), and the period of Ottoman Reforms (1830s–1870s). During this second phase the relationship between the Ottoman centre and the provinces was systematically centralised, and the administrative and political clout of Jerusalem was dramatically changed. Indeed, by 1873 Jerusalem had become a separate sanjaq (mutasarrifiyah) and directly attached to Istanbul.

Parallel to the two historical phases, *Ottoman Jerusalem* presents another division based on a chronology of architectural monuments. Although ubiquitous in the various chapters on architecture, the parallel time frame is best expressed by Yusuf Natsheh. In his article (Ch. 36, page 588) Natsheh divides the architectural development of Jerusalem into two phases: “the first covers the period extending from the time of Sulṭān Sulaymān I (926–974/1520–1566) until the end of the sixteenth century, and the second begins in the 17th century and finishes in 1247/1831”. The distinction between the two phases is based on the nature of architectural patronage. The first phase was distinguished by substantial foundations and restoration projects, and the second by modest projects and minor building repairs. The architectural activities in Jerusalem between 1831 and 1917, which he sometimes refers to as a third phase, are not included in the survey, and are the subject of only two articles (Roaf, Ch. 25; and Sharif, Ch. 30).

The discrepancy between the historical and architectural time frames is made more obvious by the fact that there is no discussion anywhere in the book of its purpose and focus: is *Ottoman Jerusalem* a book dealing with the
sixteenth century only or is it meant to address the Ottoman period as a whole? Most of the articles dealing with architecture concentrate on the sixteenth century, especially the architectural patronage under Sulṭān Sulaymān. A few articles address the 17th and 18th centuries, but only tangentially. And finally, a limited number of articles deal with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thus missing a period of important investment and patronage in Ottoman Jerusalem.

The importance of this discrepancy, in my opinion, is that it highlights a cleavage between a historical perspective and understanding of Jerusalem as part of the Ottoman Empire, and a perspective of the city based on the direct intervention of Ottoman Sulṭāns in the urban development of the city, and more specifically a perspective based on the “beauty and grandeur” of its buildings. This cleavage highlights an important question that is raised, either directly or indirectly, by most authors in *Ottoman Jerusalem*.

The book in its current status is originally based on the premise of an architectural study; thus the nature of Ottoman architecture in Jerusalem was perceived as a suitable criteria for the assessment of Jerusalem’s importance for the Ottomans. It is obvious that the Ottoman architecture of Jerusalem is limited. Other than Sulṭān Sulaymān’s main restoration of the Dome of the Rock (Carswell, Ch. 27; and Natsheh, Ch. 36) most projects were small in scale and functional in purpose. They certainly cannot be compared to the magnificence of Ottoman architectural patronage in Istanbul, Makkah, or even Damascus. Furthermore, compared to the vast Mamlūk architectural heritage in Jerusalem, the Ottomans did not leave any important mosques or madrasas, or even a distinctive architectural style.

But does this limited architectural heritage indicate that Jerusalem was not important to the Ottomans (Hillenbrand, introduction; Kreiser, Ch. 4)? I propose that phrasing the question in this manner limits the debate to “Jerusalem” as opposed to “Ottoman Jerusalem”. That is, approaching the history and importance of Jerusalem from the perspective of monumental Ottoman architecture rather than seeing Jerusalem as a holy Muslim city whose fortunes and urbanisation are related to the changing and often volatile Ottoman context misses an important aspect of Jerusalem’s history. After the Ottoman conquest in 922/1516, the Ottomans divided the province of

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9 It is important to note that the main bulk of Ottoman architectural patronage in Damascus and Aleppo also took place in the initial building boom during the sixteenth century. Central Ottoman architectural patronage after that remained minimal (less than Jerusalem) until the post-Tanzimat period. Furthermore, one should note that the nature and location of architectural patronage in Aleppo and Damascus was not consistent. Major mosque complexes on the pilgrims’ route were the focus of patronage in Damascus, whereas the focus in Aleppo, both in function and location, was mainly commercial.
Damascus, which included Jerusalem, more or less according to the local power groups. The different sanjaqs were controlled by competing dynasties who mostly originated from the Imperial household (as kapi kullari or kullarin kullari).\(^\text{10}\) By the end of the seventeenth century, the nature of power groups in control of the province of Damascus had changed dramatically, changing in its wake the importance, or lack, of the different sanjaqs. The assumption that Jerusalem became “politically a backwater” during the 18th century (p. 28) can be easily explained as a result of the lack of involvement of the city’s intellectual elite in the power struggles of the local a’yan in Bilād al-Shām. In comparison to the powerful land-owning and military families in Damascus or Nablus, Jerusalem, it could be argued, failed to capitalise on the rise of local a’yan to political power. Jerusalem’s powerful families were mainly šīfit and ‘ulamā’ (Rafeq, Ch. 3; ‘Alami, Ch. 11), and thus chose not to take part in political struggle (Rafeq, Ch. 1). Instead, they capitalised on the religious importance of their city and provided cadres of ‘ulamā’, qādis, muftis and intellectuals for the whole of Palestine (Kasmieh, Ch. 2; Rafeq, Ch. 3; and Khalidi, Ch. 15).

This, in my view, provides a tangible explanation for Jerusalem’s lack of monumental architecture during a time when other provincial cities such as Damascus, Nablus and Acre became adorned by symbols of local power and political legitimation. It would have been perhaps equally relevant to look into the development of the extended residential buildings of the traditional families of Jerusalem and examine their architectural patronage over time. Such an approach would have complemented the book, shed more light on an essential part of Ottoman Jerusalem and formed a more relevant bridge between architecture and history. Readings of *Ottoman Jerusalem* are often defined by their approaches. Notwithstanding, *Ottoman Jerusalem* provides a firm foundation on which to build future research and ask more questions. Certainly the time is ripe.

Ruba Kan’an

A typical ally of Jerusalem